


Board of County Commissioners Agenda Request

Date of Meeting: June 14, 2005

Date Submitted: June 8, 2005

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Parwez Alam, County Administrator 
Vincent Long, Assistant County Administrator

Subject: Acceptance of Report Regarding Revisions to Policy No. 01-10, "Travel"

Statement of Issue:

This agenda item requests Board acceptance of staff's report regarding consideration of amending Policy No. 01-10, "Travel" (Attachment #1).

Background:

During their regular meeting on May 10, 2005, the Board directed staff to review the County's Travel Policy (Policy No. 01-10), adopted by the Board on July 31, 2001, and prepare an agenda item with alternatives to Policy No. 01-10, Section VII, "Travel Authorization"; specifically, policy options regarding the approval of travel for elected officials (Attachment #2).

Analysis:

Section VII, "Travel Authorization" of the Travel Policy states the following:

"Elected Officials: Travel of individual County commissioners and their aides shall be approved in advance, whenever possible, by the Board of County Commissioners via an agenda item at a regularly scheduled Board meeting. In cases where travel cannot be agendaed for approval prior to the trip, it shall be agendaed within two meetings following the conclusion of the travel." (Attachment #1, Page 3):

This section of the Travel Policy regarding "elected officials" was drafted because of a travel audit conducted by the Clerk's office and concern related to the authorization process for Commissioner's travel expenses (Attachment #3). The findings of the travel audit culminated in a series of recommendations for revision to the County's Travel Policy. Significantly, the report included a recommendation to

"clarify the process for travel approval and reimbursement for those not under the County Administrator's direct span of control, including County Commissioners and their aides..."

The County's current travel policy requires Board authorization of Commissioner travel requests as part of the agenda process.

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On October 9, 2001, the Board adopted an Ordinance creating Section 2.192 of the Leon County Code of Laws: "Expenditures by Authorized Persons" (Attachment #4). The Ordinance provides for the reimbursement of authorized travel expenses in accordance with the County's travel policy. Section 112.061, Florida Statutes, also provides guidelines by which travel expenses and reimbursements may be incurred by county officials in accordance with state law (Attachment #5).

Staff conducted a survey of comparable counties to identify how their governments approve travel reimbursement requests for their elected officials. Table #1, below, provides an overview of the process by which these "like-sized" counties approve the travel requests of their commissioners.

Table #1: Travel Request/Approval Processes of Like-Sized Counties.

Like-Sized County	Overview of Travel Request/Approval Process for Commissioners
Alachua County	Each Commissioner is responsible for the approval of their travel reimbursement request(s) and is expected to operate within their own travel budget each year. After completion of their travel, each Commissioner processes "request for reimbursement" forms through the County Administrator's office for payment.
Collier County	Each Commissioner prepares a separate agenda item for each travel request for Board consideration and approval at a regularly scheduled meeting.
Escambia County	At the beginning of each year, staff prepares an agenda item for Board consideration and approval that outlines a "travel schedule" for the upcoming year. This "schedule" includes established annual conferences (FAC, NACo) and requests Board approval for any Commissioners wishing to travel to those conferences in the year ahead. As full Board approval is required, each Commissioner is responsible for making travel requests for events that are NOT on the "travel schedule" through preparation of a separate agenda item at a regularly scheduled meeting.
Manatee County	A consent agenda item is normally considered during the first regular meeting of each fiscal year to approve all Commissioner travel requests for "county business" for the upcoming fiscal year. This essentially creates "blanket" approval for each commissioner to thereafter approve their own travel requests within their allotted travel budget.
Marion County	Each Commissioner prepares a separate agenda item for each travel request for Board consideration and approval at a regularly scheduled meeting.
Sarasota County	Each Commissioner raises travel requests during their allotted time at a regularly scheduled Board meeting for Board consideration and approval. In addition, Commissioner travel to established annual conferences (FAC, NACo) is discussed during the Board's annual retreat. Commissioner travel requests stemming from that discussion are approved as part of the "Board retreat" ratification agenda item.
Seminole County	Each Commissioner raises travel requests during their allotted time at a regularly scheduled Board meeting for Board consideration and approval. Agenda items are normally not prepared and travel is usually approved "without objection."

As alternatives to the County's Travel Policy, there are a number of options available to the Board by which Commissioner and Commissioner Aide travel may be approved and reimbursed in accordance with state law and existing County ordinances. The following are suggestions of how Travel Policy No. 01-10, Section VII "Elected Officials" may be amended to approve travel for Commissioners and their Aides:

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- Status Quo: Under this option, the Board would not revise the existing travel policy at this time (Option #1).
- Chairman of the Board Approval: Under this option, Section VII of the Travel Policy No. 01-10 would be amended to reflect that each Commissioner and all Commission Aides would submit appropriate County travel requests to the *Chairman of the Board* for review and approval. This option could include an appeal process whereby all denials are to be placed on the "general business" agenda for Board consideration at their next regularly scheduled meeting (Option #2).
- County Administrator Approval: Under this option, Section VII of Travel Policy No. 01-10 would be amended to reflect that each Commissioner and all Commission Aides would submit appropriate County travel requests to the *County Administrator* for review and approval. This option could include an appeal process whereby all denials are to be placed on the "general business" agenda for Board consideration at their next regularly scheduled meeting (Option #3).
- Request to Agenda Item to Approve Annual Commissioner "Travel Schedule": Under this option, no change to the existing travel policy would be required and all travel by Commissioners and their Aides would still require Board approval. However, once per year, staff could prepare an agenda item requesting Board approval of a Commissioner "Travel Schedule", similar to Escambia County. The Travel Schedule would include County-related conferences such as the FAC and NACo Annual Conferences, the NACo Legislative Conference, and any other events routinely attended or requested by Commissioners, such as the Chamber of Commerce Annual Retreat. The Travel Schedule agenda item will request Board approval of Commissioner travel to conferences/events on the Travel Schedule, pending available travel budget at the time of the event. Any travel requests by Commissioners for events that were not on the approved "travel schedule" would be placed on the agenda for Board approval similar to current practice (Option #4).

At this time, staff does not recommend the Board take further action to revise Policy No. 01-10, "Travel", Section VII, "Travel Authorization". However, to expedite approval of routine Commissioner travel requests, for events that are normally attended by Commissioners each year, staff recommends drafting an agenda item to approve a Board "Travel Schedule" for the remainder of 2005. This agenda item would come before the Board at the June 28, 2005 meeting.

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Options:

1. Accept staff report regarding Policy No. 01-10, "Travel" and take no further action to revise the Policy.
2. Direct staff to prepare an agenda item, for the Board's regular meeting on June 28, 2005, to approve a Board "Travel Schedule" for the remainder of calendar 2005.
3. Direct staff to prepare an agenda item, for Board's regular meeting on June 28, 2005, to approve the Policy No. 01-10, "Travel", as amended, to reflect that all travel requests made by Commissioners and Commission Aides will be submitted to the *Chairman of the Board* for approval; denials may be appealed to the Board of County Commissioners.
4. Direct staff to prepare an agenda item for Board's regular meeting on June 28, 2005 to approve the Policy No. 01-10, "Travel", as amended, to reflect that all travel requests made by Commissioners and Commission Aides will be submitted to the *County Administrator* for approval; denials may be appealed to the Board of County Commissioners.
5. Board direction.

Recommendation:

Options #1 and #2.

Attachments:

1. Leon County Policy No. 01-10, "Travel"
2. Follow-up to May 10, 2005 Board Meeting
3. July 31, 2001 Agenda "Revised Travel Policy..."
4. Section 2-192, Leon County Code of Laws, relating to travel expenditures by authorized persons.
5. Section 112.061, Florida Statutes, relating to per diem and travel expenses of public officers, employees, and authorized persons.

PA/VL/BP/bp